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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a child development project implemented in an attempt to demonstrate that a full range of child development services can be centered in an elementary school. Child development services are defined as a broad array of support systems to children and their families which facilitate the children's progression through life--their acquisition of the competences and attitudes which enable them to feel of consequence to themselves and others. The major components of the project described and discussed are: (1) establishment of an early childhood education program for children six months of age and older, use of empty classrooms in the project school; (2) reorganization of the entire school into an extended day school, open from 6:45 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.; (3) development of a framework of cooperation between a university and the local school district for supervision of the project; (4) involvement of the families of enrolled children in all aspects of the project; (5) encouragement of positive researcher/teacher relations by requiring all researchers to spend some time working directly with the children; (6) establishment of a health program for the school (later terminated); (7) revision of the student teaching experience for senior interns to feature a developmental approach; and (8) creation of a viable staff development program. (Author/JMB)

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THE PUBLIC SCHOOL AS A DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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It is interesting to note how the term "child development" has soared to popularity in the last few years. In the disciplinary organization of colleges and universities, it used to get lost (or driven out), often finding refuge in a nurturant College of Home Economics or living in limbo between departments and colleges. People in psychology used the word pejoratively in such a way as to connote, I think, an "easy" curriculum -- the curriculum choice of the mediocre students who could not expect to "make it" in psychology and who could be expected ever after to entertain at parties with autoharps and to wear navy blue sneakers. People in education used the term apologetically or with lip service, recognizing it as an orientation that students "had to have" before they could get on with the practical business of their methods courses. I claim the right to offer those interpretations, as I have lived and continue to live in all those worlds and feel that I have assimilated most of the disciplinary jargon well enough to understand the connotative meaning of the term.

But suddenly the term is "in," and what it stands for is "in." As a consequence some of those people in psychology are actually eating lunch occasionally with those nice ladies in Home Ec. (now referred to as human development or human ecology people), suggesting joint teaching of courses and possibly even some sharing of that scarce commodity -- students. And people in education are suddenly rethinking the syllabus of Ed. 101 (described briefly in the catalogue as "Child Growth and Development -- a requirement for all education majors") and advertising their training sequence as "featuring a child development orientation."

To some extent the term has even invaded the world of the public school, although to a significantly less degree. Many high schools now offer some sort of course in "child development" as part of pre-parent (or parent) education. And, of course, many public schools are now in the business of "early childhood education," operating programs under Title I of ESEA or perhaps with Model Cities Money --

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and occasionally even with locally appropriated funds. However, I know of precious few schools that describe themselves as operating child development programs, or that describe their schools (for students of any age) as "child development centers." People who represent public education have to spend so much time these days wiping off the stains left by hurled epithets, countering charges that they are producing alienation and dehumanization, trying to prove to the public that the "school is not dead," etc., that they have little time or energy to conceptualize just what they are doing. And one of the things that they are doing inadequately or successfully, is providing child development services.

For purposes of our discussion I am going to define child development services as a broad array of support systems to the child and the family which will facilitate the cumulative progression through life, the acquisition of competencies and attitudes which at any and all points in the life cycle enable the child to feel of consequence to himself and others. The need for such services is probably inversely related to the age of the child, but the need remains throughout childhood. (If we were to broaden our term and speak of human development, then obviously we would recognize that the need would remain throughout life.)

For five years now I have had the good fortune of being associated with an effort to demonstrate that a full array of child development programs can be centered in an elementary school. In fact, it is my personal conviction that the elementary school is the only delivery system with anything like the universal reach needed in this country at this time -- though that point of view is obviously open to debate. In my time this morning I would like to describe to you some of the major components of this program and offer a brief critique of how well or how poorly we feel they have worked. Also I will share with you what I see as the major problem we encounter, and offer a few suggestions to the hardy among you who would go and do likewise. Before proceeding let me mention that from 1969 to 1974, the project was supported largely by a grant from the Office of Child Development.

Components of a Child Development Program in a Public School

1. We established an early childhood education program for children down to six months of age, using empty classrooms in our project school. The school itself, prior to the launching of the project, was a regular Little Rock School District elementary school (Kramer School). The aim of this linkage was to permit continuity of development from the preschool years right through the elementary years. Data from Head Start and early intervention projects had shown that cognitive and social gains

could be facilitated in quality early childhood programs but that these gains were often lost or attenuated after the children reached the elementary years. Our goal was to create collaboratively between the school and the home a supportive environment which would help provide the experiences young children needed to develop optimally during this period. Then we hoped to facilitate whatever adaptations were necessary at the elementary level to "move the child development approach upward" into the elementary school.

2. We changed the entire school into an extended day school, open from 6:45 a.m. to 5:15 p.m., thus providing day care within the same facility that education was provided. To make a distinction between "education" and "day care" is to me patently ridiculous, an exercise in professional discipline-protection which certainly does not deserve to be associated with anything called a "child development approach." This part of our venture has gone beautifully and is perhaps the child development service most closely associated with the project's local and national (if it has one) identity. Until June all the extra components of the Kramer model were funded by the OCD grant. Beginning in September of 1974 we will be operating the day care (both preschool and elementary) with funds from Title IV-A of the Social Security Act. This will be the first time in the State of Arkansas that a local school district will be the contractor for a Title IV-A program -- we do not know if this has been done in other states. We see in this arrangement an encouraging precedent of cooperation between two public agencies, both of which can conceivably offer developmental services on parallel tracks that never meet.

3. We developed a framework of cooperation between a university and the local school district. An Advisory Board consisting of representatives of the university where senior level research staff had faculty appointments and personnel from the Little Rock School District has overseen the operation of the project. It is worth commenting that, during the five years of the project, our institutional identification has drifted closer to the school district. Quite a bit of time was required in the early stages for the development in school district personnel of "basic trust" in the project staff. That trust was made concrete and tangible two years ago when the project director was made principal of the school. That act further unified our administrative structure -- a term that used to make me cringe in horror -- and immeasureably strengthened the likelihood that the project's ideas

would gain acceptance with the elementary teachers. It also set us up for dissemination outward.

4. We tried to involve the families in all aspects of the project -- group activities, discussion groups for parents of children with problems, social services to parents in their homes, home tutoring, etc. This has consistently been the most difficult goal to achieve. Most of our mothers work, and their left-over time and energy are in short supply. Nevertheless, our parents have been our biggest boosters.

5. We have nicely demonstrated that research and development can occur comfortably within a public school setting. By virtue of working very hard at avoiding a schism between teachers and researchers we avoided the usual situation where the teachers are suspicious of "those researchers" who are doing research on us." I heartily recommend one simple technique that we used -- all researchers are required to spend some time working directly with the children -- at recess or lunch time (when the kids tend to be wild and obstreperous), when a teacher needs to be excused for a parent conference, early in the morning when many children are coming at once, etc. We have had some stormy times in this area, but we have weathered them -- and the research has gone on.

6. We tried to facilitate the development of a sensitive health program for the school which was not satisfactory and our staff and the medical personnel involved jointly agreed that it should be terminated. Although we engaged in a fairly lengthy planning period for the medical program, communication was apparently not effective in either direction. From our standpoint we wanted a medical program that would ensure that the children remain as healthy as possible, that there was not unnecessary spreading of infectious diseases, and that was sinsitive to the time realities of our largely employed mothers. Also we wanted some help for the staff in identifying potential health problems, partly as a basis for supporting some of our work with parents. But in addition we had felt that the "loco parentis" situation of the ordinary school and day care center required some clarification in relation to the delivery of health services and were interested in trying to define this situation in such a way that would provide clarity for the entire day care field. From the standpoint of the persons who helped engage in the medical planning, there was concern with closer contact with a school health program and an interest in possibly being involved in the research program of the Center.

Once the program reached the operational stage, however, it did not look much like it had on paper (how true of so many programs!). Our analysis of the problem was that the medical person assigned to work with us lacked this marvelous quality that we are calling "the child development approach"; without this sort of training, medical personnel are likely to consider themselves over-trained for such a role. (One of the psysicians assigned to work in our health center confided to me that he was disappointed because he had left private practice to return for more training out of boredom with "runny noses and diarrhea," and yet these were the most common medical problems he encountered at Kramer.) Next year we hope to reorganize our medical program with a nurse-practitioner working with us and hope that this will help us combat the "over-trained syndrome" problem.

6. We have reorganized the student teaching experience for senior interns to feature a developmental approach -- the unique thing we feel we have to give to prospective teachers. No matter what age or grade level a student teacher might give as her eventual professional objective, we have him or her spend some time with children in all the groups in the school. We also require contact with families as part of the training experience. Next year we will have students involved with the children as part of their pre-professional training. We would like to be able to offer an extra year of training as a true internship and hope to add this to our program in the near future.

7. We have developed a viable staff development program. People who do not live in a public school environment cannot appreciate the importance of this achievement, for they do not fully realize the intellectual isolation that characterizes the daily life of the public school teacher in many respects. In no other setting is the "minding the store" problem more critical. As someone must always provide supervision of the children during the hours that school is in session, it is difficult if not impossible to get an entire staff together during school hours. And by the end of the day, rare indeed is the teacher who can even sit and listen much less actively contribute to a training session designed to help solve existing problems or plan for innovative teaching activities. Many contracts protect the teachers from an administrative staff that attempts to require teachers to attend such meetings beyond school hours with any regularity. Yet how can a group of people dedicated to the task of helping children develop become a true group if they do not get together

frequently to share ideas, to gripe, to plan, and just to get to know one another.

In our project we have managed this luxury for the teachers by utilizing the research staff and extra faculty (PE, art, etc.) provided by our grant to cover the classrooms long enough to permit in-service staff meetings. Schools that have active parent groups can accomplish the same objectives by seeking help from the parents, although with that approach it might be possible to arrange for only sectional meetings (e.g., all primary teachers, all intermediate teachers, etc.). Having all the teachers and the principal withdraw from the children at once can be a signal for chaos to erupt unless some professionals identified by the children as part of the school structure remain on duty.

In our in-service meetings we have covered a wide array of topics -- the school reading program, improving human relations and discipline, science instruction, social studies, staff assignments, school programs, etc. In addition we have devoted a great deal of time to helping the staff members fully understand the scope and objectives of the total project. Some of our time we have devoted to helping us understand ourselves better as individuals, all of whom have an important contribution to make to the total endeavor. Without some opportunity for this sort of coming together of the staff, any special or innovative program offered under the auspices of the public schools is likely to encounter difficulties.

Problems We Have Encountered and Recommendations

1. Our biggest problem has been just what you would expect -- money. One cannot expect a school district to add these extra developmental services without some extra financial support. Our project was funded as a five-year research project, and by about the middle of our five years we no longer fit the OCD research priorities. Furthermore, a large part of our budget went for the early childhood program (totally apart from the research), and we heard rumblings that it was too expensive to continue. We remain eternally grateful to OCD for letting us stay alive for five years, incidentally. But five years is not long enough to test out the effectiveness of this kind of project. Let me share with you one of the pearls of wisdom that I pass out freely to people these days: it is a lot harder to implement an idea than it is to generate that idea in the first place. But we must not give up just because it is difficult.

2. Our second biggest problem has been administrative. "The project" was essentially an administrative intrusion into an already bureaucratically burdened system. Our OCD grant went to the university where I had a faculty appointment, which meant that all the preschool teachers were university employees and all elementary teachers were school district employees. I had clear lines of authority with all "project" personnel, but the elementary teachers and the school principal had other traditional channels of authority. This remained a problem until I was made principal of the school. (Now I am the only one with the confused and multiple channels of authority.) As I look back on that in retrospect, I find it almost incredible that we did not anticipate that problem. If we could do it over again, I would have the money go directly to the school system; university involvement could still be sought and encouraged. A number of our big city school districts have research and development offices, and many smaller communities have the local talent available to permit such innovative arrangements. Of course, I am convinced that not too many university people could stand the gaff -- you have to work too hard when you are a public school employee!

3. The last problem I would mention relates to the personal factor in a venture like this -- and perhaps it is the most important problem of all. Reams have been written about the process of change, forces which resist and forces which facilitate it. Sarason (1971) has written an absorbing case history of the attempts by a group of highly educated consultants to produce changes in teacher behavior and the school climate and in which he concludes that "the more things change, the more they are the same." He also cautions us that you cannot change the schools from outside the system. Haubrich (1971) has charged that we have a system of education which has an enormous capacity to absorb change while not changing at all. And on and on go the litanies about how the education bureaucracy resists change. There used to be an old joke that claimed that no one had the right to criticize psychoanalysis until one had been psychoanalyzed -- by which time he or she would be brainwashed and no longer see anything wrong with the system. We do face something of that paradox when we talk about changing schools to make them more sensitive to developmental needs of children. In our panel we are raising the question in an "iffy" sort of way, which implies that the schools are not now offering such services. Such implications automatically elicit defensiveness on the part of the public school establishment -- "Why, we are so too offering child development services."

Right now, I am in something of the condition of the psychoanalyzed patient. That is, I have metamorphosed into a public school person, so those epithets and and stones hurt me now when they are thrown. I do not want to think that five years ago I walked into Kramer School and said, in effect, "Hey, you insensitive teachers and administrators, I'm here to help you humanize your program and change this expletive deleted old traditional school into a swinging place with what we 'in' people call the child development orientation." But I probably did -- not in those words, but possibly those attitudes. So my final suggestion to those of you who might want to try some part of our experience is that, whatever you do, please avoid that mistake. Remind the public school people that they are already speaking prose. Remind them that apart from a few private schools and health services and programs like Head Start, they might be the only people in the community offering a variety of child development services. Find out what resources they feel they need to elaborate and extend those services. And find out what kinds of help they can accept from you and other groups in the community. If you do that, I predict that the public schools -- our only delivery system with the possibility of universal reach -- will reach out to help.

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